

# Automated Export System

*Vessel Transportation  
Module: Ocean  
Vessel Carriers*

U.S. CUSTOMS



# Automated Export System

## *Vessel Transportation Module: Ocean Vessel Carriers*



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## **Contents**

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Foreword.....	v
Introduction .....	vii
What is AES?.....	1
What is the Vessel Transportation Module?.....	1
What is the “Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement?” .....	2
Why use the AES Vessel Transportation Module? .....	2
Why was AES developed? .....	3
How the AES Vessel Transportation Module works. ....	4
The Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement.....	6
Penalty Mitigation .....	7
What happens if the computers fail? .....	8
AES software solutions.....	9
Ready to get started? .....	9
Letter of Intent (LOI).....	11
For more information .....	12

## Foreword

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*The Automated Export System: Vessel Transportation Module* was developed by the Office of Field Operations as a resource for ocean carriers that provides information concerning the Automated Export System (AES) Vessel Transportation Model, and the Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement. An electronic copy of this publication is available on the Customs AES Web Site at **[www.customs.gov](http://www.customs.gov)**.

## **Introduction**

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This guide was developed with the aim of introducing ocean carriers to the AES Vessel Transportation Module. It outlines, in general terms, how the system operates, the types and timing of messages, and the advantages that AES offers to carriers who utilize the Vessel Transportation Module.

This guide also provides an overview of the Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement and the benefits available to eligible carriers who sign the agreement.

## **What is AES?**

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The Automated Export System (AES) is a program that is jointly administered by the U.S. Customs Service and the Bureau of Census. AES is the only automated system in the U.S. for reporting export data, both commodity (Shipper's Export Declarations – SEDs) and transportation (booking and manifest). This information is used by Customs to identify high-risk shipments and by Census to compile and report export data that is used to compute the balance of the trade statistics.

- AES meets today's demand to bring trade and technology together.
- AES puts an end to manual, paper-driven processes, replacing them with electronic communication.
- AES provides an opportunity to be more competitive in today's global economy; to join the movement towards a global e-commerce climate; and to put technology to work.

## **What is the AES Vessel Transportation Module?**

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The Vessel Transportation Module allows vessel carriers to electronically report export vessel booking and manifest data to Customs. This will put an end to the cumbersome tasks of printing booking reports, preparing and delivering reams of paper manifests, and the storing of paper documents.

- The Vessel Transportation Module will also reduce the costs associated with courier deliveries of paper manifests to the port of export.
- The Vessel Transportation Module is the first of several planned transportation modules in AES.

## What is the “Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement?”

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The Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement is a cooperative program between Customs and vessel carriers designed to promote compliance with manifest requirements.

- Carriers that sign the agreement and meet all requirements may have penalties and liquidated damages mitigated.
- Participating carriers that operate a Centralized Documentation Center will be permitted to file all paper SEDs for a complete manifest at the Customs office in the city where that center is located. The SEDs may be filed up to four calendar days after vessel departure from the final port of export.

AES is the tool that brings the government and the export community together in the information age.

## Why use the AES Vessel Transportation Module?

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AES simplifies the export process:

### **Reduce paper**

We are changing the way we do business, eliminating paper, and transferring information electronically. AES is a tool for achieving this goal.

### **Promote Compliance**

Up-front edits in AES indicate mandatory data fields, allowing for more complete data entry and increasing compliance with the reporting requirements of the U.S. Customs Service.

### **Save time**

Transmitting booking and manifest information directly to Customs is implicitly faster and more efficient than printing requested booking reports and producing reams of paper mani-

fees. Participating in the AES Vessel Transportation Module also extends the time frames for submitting a manifest from the present four days to a maximum of ten calendar days after the departure of the vessel.

### **Save Money**

Electronic transmissions to AES will significantly reduce costs associated with printing, courier deliveries to the port of export, and storage of paper manifests. The AES Vessel Transportation Module may also reduce the number of shipments missing scheduled sailings. By receiving the booking data earlier in the export process, AES can target high-risk shipments and electronically notify the carriers if a verification examination is needed. This may help the carrier schedule the examination far enough in advance so that most shipments will make their scheduled sailings. Off-loading or redelivering a container is very costly.

## **Why was AES developed?**

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### **Save tax dollars**

AES was developed to reduce the number of paper documents handled by the export community, both trade and government. A paper SED changes hands many times before it reaches the Bureau of Census for entry into their database. Most paper SED's are originally generated by a computer, transferred to paper, and then shipped to Census for re-entry into a computer. Generating and handling paper booking reports and manifests, while not travelling through as many hands, is still a tremendous waste of time and resources for the trade community and the government.

### **Smarter targeting**

The Vessel Transportation Module allows Customs to match commodity data with the booking and manifest data, thus allowing Customs to focus on high-risk shipments. By receiving this information early in the export process, most verification examinations can be scheduled far enough in advance that most shipments



should make their scheduled sailings. More complete up-front transportation data should reduce delays for the carriers by decreasing the number of Customs verification examinations stemming from inadequate data.

### **Better trade statistics**

By passing all data through electronic edits, AES can drastically reduce the amount of inaccurate or incomplete information received by the Bureau of Census. The trade statistics generated by Census are used by many different federal and local agencies for trade policy decision-making, export control, and port development planning, and by the trade and financial communities for foreign market analysis, penetration studies, and investment decisions.

## **How the AES Vessel Transportation Module works.**

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Vessel carriers participating in the Transportation Module will transmit four electronic messages to AES:

### **1) Booking Message**

Either on a flow basis or in batches, the carrier may transmit bookings to AES as far in advance of export as the carrier elects, but all available bookings will be transmitted 72 hours prior to departure. All bookings received after the 72-hour mark will be transmitted when received. The “Booking Message” includes information on the customer/shipper, cargo, and destination.

### **2) Receipt of Booking Message**

Upon the carrier’s receipt of the first piece of booked cargo, the carrier transmits a “Receipt of Booking Message” to AES. If Customs determines that a verification examination is required, Customs will immediately return a “Hold Message” to the carrier. If the carrier does not receive a “Hold Message,” the cargo may be loaded on the vessel.

When Customs has completed a required examination and determined that the cargo may be exported, a “Release Message” will be transmitted to the carrier.

### **3) Departure Message**

The carrier will transmit the “Departure Message” no later than the first calendar day following the actual departure of the vessel. This message notifies Customs that the vessel has departed, and includes the date and time of departure, vessel name, carrier SCAC code, and load port.

### **4) Manifest Message**

Within ten calendar days after departure from each port, the carrier will transmit the entire manifest electronically. This is a change from the present four-day filing requirement for paper manifests, which will remain the same. All paper SED’s must be delivered to the port of export within four days after the date of departure.

NOTE: The “Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement” allows carriers with Centralized Documentation Centers an additional option for filing paper SEDs. Carriers, who elect to sign and meet all responsibilities of the agreement, may deliver all SEDs for an entire manifest to one local Customs office (in the carrier’s Central Documentation Center city) up to four calendar days after departure from the final port of export.

## **The Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement**

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### **Carrier responsibilities:**

- Must be an active AES carrier providing transportation data nationwide.
- Designate a single Point of Contact for all matters associated with the carrier agreement.
- Achieve and maintain an 85 percent outbound manifest compliance rate nationwide.
- Implement internal controls to ensure documents/procedures are complete and timely.
- Ensure that all manifest and Bill of Lading data submitted is complete.
- Provide evidence that attempts have been made to obtain SEDs prior to departure, if requested.
- Require personnel to cooperate and assist Customs with export enforcement programs.
- Inform personnel of the need for export regulations and the consequences of violations.
- Provide Customs access to data in cargo and container tracking systems upon request.
- Produce required documents in a timely manner for enforcement/investigation actions.
- Provide documentation of compliance with each item of the agreement, if requested.
- Provide training when beneficial.
- Encourage customers to participate in AES.
- Coordinate with Customs in press releases, and other information to the public, which involve the carrier's interest in the agreement.

## **Customs responsibilities:**

- Recommend best practices for compliance to carriers as necessary.
- Assist in identifying high-risk/non-compliant port offices, routes, and facilities.
- Provide carriers with a single Point of Contact for all matters relative to the agreement.
- Allow participants to file all paper SEDs for an entire voyage, four calendar days after departure from the final port in the U.S., at the Customs office in the carrier's Centralized Documentation Center city.
- Work with carrier management on press releases that involve the carrier's interest in the Carrier Agreement.
- Provide training when beneficial.

## **Penalty Mitigation**

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Advantages in the area of penalty procedures are available to carriers that continually meet all the carrier responsibilities set forth in the "Outbound Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement."

Participating carriers benefit from having fewer penalties assessed for minor violations, and using a streamlined penalty mitigation process.

## **No penalty assessed:**

- Minimal law enforcement interest.
- Carrier provides specific information about the violation prior to Customs discovery.
- Breakdown in procedure which had in the past been effective.

### **Penalties assessed if cases do not fall into the above three categories (Mitigation will be available):**

- First instance – penalty remitted in full if it is determined that the carrier was not culpable.
- Second instance within six months — Customs offers participating carriers the option of paying 25 percent of the claim in lieu of filing a petition for relief.
- Third instance within six months of the second — full penalty/Liquidated Damages, mitigation decision within 60 days. Mitigated amount not less than the second violation.

If six months elapse without penalty, the clock and penalty counter reset.

### **What happens if the computers fail?**

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AES downtime policy in brief:

- 1) If your computer breaks down, your cargo may still be exported.
- 2) If the AES computer breaks down, your cargo may still be exported.
- 3) Contact your assigned AES Client Representative to alert them to the situation.
- 4) Simply keep a log and transmit the information as soon as possible.

NOTE: The full text of the U.S. Customs AES downtime policy is available on the AES Web Site at **[www.customs.gov/aes](http://www.customs.gov/aes)**.

## **AES Software Solutions**

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### **Develop in-house software**

You can develop an in-house software solution if that is your business standard. If you choose in-house programming, there are two record formats available:

- CATAIR — U.S. Customs Service proprietary format
- ANSI X12

Please see the Automated Export System Trade Interface Requirements (AESTIR) on the AES Web site for specific message sets and record layouts. If you develop in-house software, you will be required to thoroughly test the software with your Customs Client Representative.

### **Buy software from a vendor**

You may buy software from a certified vendor. Certified vendors have had their software tested by Customs. The list of certified vendors is available on the AES Web site.

## **Ready to get started?**

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First, file a Letter of Intent (LOI) with Customs. The LOI is a company profile and statement of compliance. The LOI can be found in the Customs Web page. An outline of the LOI can be found on the last page of this document.

### **Client Representatives**

After the LOI is received by Customs, an AES Client Representative will be assigned to help your transition and answer your questions along the way.

## **Testing and Communications**

When you are ready, you will send test transmissions to AES, testing communications and responses to error messages.

### **Certified!**

After you complete the testing, you are certified to transmit to AES.

NO MORE PAPER BOOKING REPORTS!

NO MORE PAPER CUSTOMS MANIFESTS!

NO MORE COURIERS TO DELIVER THE  
MANIFEST TO THE PORTS!

NO MORE STORAGE OF PAPER DOCUMENTS  
FOR CUSTOMS PURPOSES!

## **Letter of Intent Outline**

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The Letter of Intent (LOI) to participate in the Vessel Transportation Module is a statement of a carrier's commitment to develop, maintain, and adhere to Customs performance requirements and operations standards as a participant in AES.

The LOI should preferably be transmitted electronically via the Internet or on company letterhead and faxed or mailed to Customs. See details below. The LOI must include the following items:

- Company Name, Address (no P.O. Boxes), City, State, Postal Code
- Company Contact Person, Phone Number, Fax Number, E-mail Address
- Corporate Office Address, City, State, Postal Code
- Technical Contact Person, Phone Number, Fax Number, E-mail Address
- Computer Site Location Address, City, State, Postal Code
- U.S. Ports of Export Currently Used
- Average Number of Monthly Export Voyages
- Average Monthly Number of Bookings
- Average Monthly Number of Bills of Lading
- Carrier SCAC Code
- Software Vendor Name, Contact, Phone Number, FAX Number, and E-mail Address (if using vendor provided software)
- Look-a-Like Remote to Copy (as provided by vendor)
- Anticipated Implementation Date



- U.S. Customs AMS Client Representative name (if an AMS carrier)
- Party Transmitting (if other than applicant) Contact Name, FAX, and E-mail Address
- Status of AES Development (Planning, Programming, Ready to Test)
- Type of Format (Customs Proprietary, ANSI X12)

The following is the self-certification statement.

I hereby certify that **(Carrier Name)** is, and will continue to be, in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

## LOI via the Internet

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Access Customs Web page at **www.customs.gov**  
Click on Importing & Exporting,  
Scroll down to Exporting,  
Click on Automated Export System (AES),  
Scroll down to Letter of Intent (LOI) Form  
– Vessel Transportation Data.

## For more information

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For more information on the Vessel Transportation Module or the Vessel Carrier Manifest Compliance Agreement, please visit the Customs Web Site at **www.customs.gov/aes**, call your AMS Client Representative, or call:

(202) 927-6060



## U.S. Customs Service Washington, D.C. 20229

Please visit the U.S. Customs Web Site at <http://www.customs.gov>

TO REPORT DRUG SMUGGLING

**1(800) BE ALERT**

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